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War and Pacifism in *The Lord of the Rings*

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Abstract

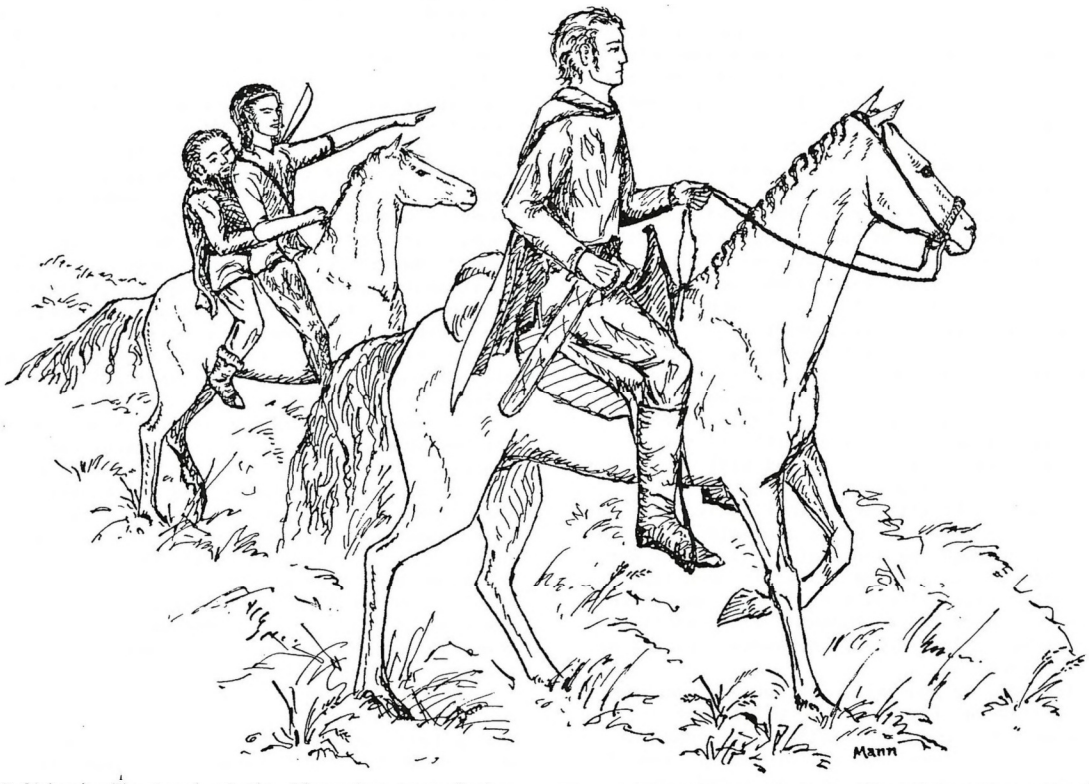
Examines polarized reactions to *The Lord of the Rings* as both a pro-war and pacifistic work. Sees it as much more balanced, showing Tolkien believed war to sometimes be necessary but peace to be preferable, and mercy to be important above all.

Additional Keywords

Pacifism in The Lord of the Rings; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings; War in J.R.R. Tolkien

WAR AND PACIFISM IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS

by Nan C. Scott



J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings has provoked curiously polarized reactions to its treatment of war and peace. Emotionally highly charged at any time, the military and the pacifistic responses to the needs and problems of our Middle-earth have rarely been so hotly contested and strongly defended as in these present dark times. Thus, the divergent views of Tolkien's creation are particularly intensely held ones.

There are those who find in The Lord of the Rings a glorification of war and weaponry, a focusing upon the romantic and heroic elements of military conflict, and who, according to their prejudices, admire or dislike the book for this reason, or who, finding it attractive for other qualities, uneasily hedge their affections against their consciences. At the opposite extreme are those who have made almost a cult-symbol of Frodo Baggins, mostly the young who, dissatisfied with an increasingly impersonal industrial society and disillusioned and outraged by the war in Viet Nam, see a kind of pastoral paradise in the Shire of the Hobbits, and a glowing ideal in Frodo's ultimate pacifism after his return from Mordor.

To me neither of these interpretations seems wholly adequate. Tolkien has given the reader no easy answers, no pat solutions, to the ills of Middle-earth. Neither does he place much faith in armed might as a means of cleansing the world, nor does he rely upon a simplistic pacifism. Though he has not had Gandalf's or Elrond's long overview of the ages of war and intervals of Watchful Peace and war once again in Middle-earth, he has nevertheless seen in the experience of his own Twentieth Century lifetime a striking paradigm for the sad histories of earlier ages. Thus, his views of both war and pacifism, at least as he has expressed them in The Lord of the Rings, are of a challenging and thorny complexity. Eventually, in "The Scouring of the Shire," he leads the reader to an extremely painful moral dilemma. Tolkien's own solution--to the extent that he offers one--is, characteristically, religious in nature, yet heartbreaking in its implications.

The complexities of Tolkien's vision are illustrated by his very act of creating the Hobbits and plunging them into the midst of a great war. For they are a remarkably pacifistic little people, apparently lacking the fundamental taint of man's nature. "At no time," we are told, "had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought among themselves."[1] Before the Battle of Bywater, Frodo asserts that "No Hobbit has ever killed another on purpose in the Shire, and it is not to begin now."[2] Indeed, the only act of aggression committed by one Hobbit against another throughout the history of the little people seems to have been the murder of Déagol by Sméagol-Gollum, under the corruptive spell of the Ring, and Sméagol is no more than an Ur-Hobbit in any case.

Hobbits, "slow to quarrel, and for sport killing nothing that lived,"[3] steadily demonstrate humanity and kindliness as their signal traits. Little wonder then that the Shire is a demi-Eden, whose inhabitants, "generous and not greedy, but contented and moderate,"[4] live in a kind of Golden Age of pastoral poetry.

Though, as Tolkien assures us, Hobbits "In olden days...had, of course, been often obliged to fight to maintain themselves in a hard world,"[5] no longer are they accustomed to warfare, even in self-defense. Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, despite their awesome burden, the disturbing absence of Gandalf, and the pursuit of the Black Riders, are so overwhelmingly innocent that they actually set out for Rivendell unarmed. When Tom Bombadil supplies them with daggers from the barrow-hoard, the four Hobbits are surprised and uncomfortable:

> Their new weapons they hung on their leather belts under their jackets, feeling them very awkward, and wondering if they would be of any use. Fighting had not before occurred to any of them as one of the adventures in which their flight would land them.[6]

Earlier, in The Hobbit, Bilbo shows his peaceable impulses from the start. Like his young kinsmen and Sam, he is ill at ease with military gear and dislikes the thought of battle. When Thorin and his twelve companions strike up a victorious version of their dragon song in Erebor, "Bilbo's heart fell...; they sounded much too warlike";[7] and though secretly impressed by his beautiful

mithril coat, Mr. Baggins realizes that to the sensible everyday eyes of the Shire, he would look "rather absurd. How they would laugh on the Hill at home!"[8]

So eager, indeed, is Bilbo to avoid war that he attempts to bargain with the Arkenstone, being willing to give up his entire share of the dwarves' magnificent treasure hoard for the sake of peace. Despite his lack of success in preventing conflict, after the Battle of Five Armies the dying Thorin Oakenshield, "wounded with many wounds," praises Bilbo's attitude:

> There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage and some wisdom blended in measure. If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world. But sad or merry, I must leave it now. Farewell![9]

Nearly all of Bilbo's impulses, from his crucial act of mercy towards Gollum, of which I will say more later, to his kindly replacement of the keys he had stolen from the guard in the wood-elves' dungeon, illustrate the Hobbit character at its generous and sunny-natured best. His values are typical of a people who "love peace and quiet and good tilled earth,"[10] but Bilbo (and later Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin) is also able to grow spiritually, to appreciate things beyond the ken of most Shire Hobbits.

Decidedly then, the Hobbits are a peaceful, if for the most part a somewhat limited people; and their years of unambitious peace and plenty in the Shire suggest that, had they, rather then the Edain, been granted "a land to dwell in, removed from the dangers of Middle-earth,"[11] the Halflings would have made proper use of the gift and the Isle of Elenna might never have sunk into the Sea.

However, the Shire, bright garden that it is, lies not upon a protected westerly island but in the wilds of Eriador. Paradoxically, only through the constant vigilance of men at arms, Rangers of the North, are the Shirefolk permitted to pursue their carefree seasonal round of growth, abundance, and harvest. The presence of the Dúnedain alone protects the peace-loving Hobbits from Orcs...and worse. As Aragorn tells Boromir at Rivendell:

> Peace and freedom, do you say? The North would have known them little but for us. Fear would have destroyed them. But when dark things come from the houseless hills, or creep from sunless woods, they fly from us. What roads would any dare to tread, what safety would there be in quiet lands, or in the homes of simple men at night, if the Dúnedain were asleep, or were all gone into the grave?[12]

Outside the garden wall, creatures of the Darkness are prowling and multiplying, and as Gildor Inglorion warns Frodo, "The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot forever fence it out."[13]

Thus, once they are no longer defended by the Rangers, the innocent Shire and the peace-loving Bree-land are soon in desperate trouble. The Shire is occupied by half-Orcs, greedy Men, and a fallen Wizard; "And," according to old Butterbur, who, in common with many of the big people of Bree, seems more like a Hobbit than a typical Man, "there was trouble right here in Bree, bad trouble. Why, we had a real set-to, and there were folk killed, killed dead! If you'll believe me!...It's like a bit of the bad old times tales tell of, I say....You see, we're not used to such troubles: and the Rangers have all gone away, folk tell me. I don't think we've rightly understood till now what they did for us."[14]

Butterbur accordingly has learned at least one part of one truth: to survive in Middle-earth, ceaseless vigilance and some means of defense are necessary. For make no mistake: Middle-earth, beautiful, poignant, mortal, is also deadly dangerous. Not all Men are trusty, and other races there are besides Hobbits and Men.

Apparently, it has always been thus, to one degree or another, even in the deeps of time. In the Elder Days, Morgoth, to whom the terrible Sauron himself was no more than a servant, held at least the northern lands in an icy grip, guarding the stolen Silmarils in Angband. So cataclysmic was the warfare which eventually broke his great fortress of Thangorodrim that the Elven lands of Beleriand were themselves shattered and drowned in the upheaval, leaving only Lindon as a sad remnant of once-great realms. "And now," sings old Treebeard, "all those lands lie under the wave,"[15] a high price to pay indeed, for though "the Elves deemed that evil was ended for ever,...it was not so."[16]

Far from it. Throughout the Dark Years that followed, Sauron held sway in Middle-earth, ruling tyrannically over those lesser men who remained there. Still capable of assuming a deceptively attractive form, he was able to seduce the Elvensmiths of Eregion to his purposes. When Celebrimbor eventually perceived the designs of Sauron, war once more was kindled, Hollin was laid waste, Moria was besieged behind closed dwarf doors, and Elrond retreated to the North to found the refuge of Imladris, from its very beginnings a bastion against the world's evils.

After Elendil's and his sons' return to Middle-earth from the downfall of Númenor, the pattern continued: wars and cycles of Watchful Peace, failures of vigilance, and once again wars, in Elrond's words, "many defeats and many fruitless victories."[17] After the dubious triumph of the Last Alliance, Arnor, beset by internal strife which foolishly divided the realm into petty kingdoms, fell into decay as the Dúnedain dwindled in number and as wars with Angmar contined to drain away the lives of young men. Gondor survived both attacks from outside and kinstrife within amongst the Númenorean lords, but it too declined in strength, weakened by a long age of skirmishes and small border wars. A time of failed watchfulness after plagues had gravely diminished its population led to the loss of Minas Ithil, Gondor's Tower of the Moon. A new defensive posture transformed the Tower of the Sun into Minas Tirith, a fortress-city ever on guard.

So common is armed conflict in Middle-earth's long history that the Battle of Five Armies, which little Bilbo finds so terrible, which leaves even such a formidable warrior as Gandalf wounded, and which takes the lives of "many men and many dwarves and many a fair elf that should have lived yet long ages merrily in the wood,"[18] would, according to Tolkien, "scarcely have concerned later history, or earned more than a note in the long annals of the Third Age,"[19] but for Bilbo's finding of the Ring. In the longer overview of history, bloodshed and violence are merely the order of the day, business as usual, and one fearful battle seems not very significant.

Whether Morgoth's power is still active in Middle-earth during the War of the Ring, we are not told; but some mighty evil force remains unconquered and, perhaps, unconquerable. For the new age to dawn after the Ring's destruction will not, even in its first morning, be free of taint or shadow. To Théoden's fear that "much that was fair and wonderful shall pass for ever out of Middle-earth," Gandalf must sorrowfully concede that "It may....The evil of Sauron cannot be wholly cured, nor made as if it had not been. But to such days we are doomed."[20] And the wizard warns his companions in Gondor:

> Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule.[21]

From the perspective of time we can, I think, conclude that the weather will again become stormy. Tolkien reminds us in the Preface to the first edition that "those darker things which lurked only on the borders of the earlier tale ...have troubled Middle-earth in all its history."[22]

Some of "those darker things" lurking are wholly the creatures of a powerful evil being or spirit, be it Sauron or Morgoth; for it is the fate of Middle-earth that "Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again."[23] Whatever the origin of this evil in Middle-earth its presence and its puppets are a permanent fact of life. Whether the Dark Tower's powers are substantial enough for it to have created Trolls and Orcs, as Treebeard asserts,[24] or whether, unable truly to make, the Dark Lord has only corrupted previously existing creatures to his uses, as Frodo apparently believes,[25] perhaps by selective breeding, these wicked beings are cruel and pitiless enemies for whom no one, not even Gandalf or Frodo, has a word of mercy. Though Orcs have some use of language, they are never numbered amongst the free "speaking peoples" by Gandalf or Treebeard. I would guess that they lack souls, for Tolkien's most humane characters clearly regard the hewing of Orc-necks as a very different thing from the killing of Men. While the latter is undertaken at need with some sorrow or reluctance,

Orc-slaying is almost sport, exhilarating not least to the Hobbits, who are not hunters even of beasts for pleasure. Legolas is a Wood-elf, one of a people so noble and kindly that Gollum escapes through their humanity, yet he and Gimli the Dwarf bring an equally zesty enthusiasm to a game of who can kill the most Orcs during the Battle of the Hornburg. Whatever is done to an Orc is, apparently, fair enough; and even Gandalf, great apostle of mercy, swings a mighty sword whenever Goblins cross his path.

War against Men, even in self-defense, is viewed more uneasily, however. Though Frodo has blessed the archers of Ithilien in their ambush of the Men of Harad, a close-up of the actual fighting is a shock to Hobbit-nature:

> It was Sam's first view of a battle of Men against Men, and he did not like it much. He was glad that he could not see the dead face. He wondered what the man's name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart, or what lies or threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would not really rather have stayed there in peace....[26]

Not only the pacifistic little Halflings but Men, at least the more noble ones, share this attitude. Though the Rohirrim take a primitive delight in battle and war gear, and though some of the Men of Gondor have declined to such a degree that Boromir, Denethor's heir, seemed to Éomer "More like to the swift sons of Eorl than to the grave men of Gondor,"[27] Númenorean blood, when it runs true, still pulses to loftier ideals than those of military glory. Faramir, "whom no Rider of the Mark would outmatch in battle,"[28] should the need to defend himself or his men arise, is by preference a man of peace with so great a reverence for life that his bowmen spare Gollum, who flickers through the woods of Ithilien like a little animal, because of their leader's policy: they are not to "slay wild beasts for no purpose."[29]

Self-defense and defense of the weak and innocent against Sauron and his creatures, and even against those Men who have elected to follow the banner of the Eye, would seem from all historical evidence to be a necessity of survival in Middle-earth. As Éowyn tells the Warden of the Houses of Healing:

> It needs but one foe to breed a war, not two, Master Warden....And those who have not swords can still die upon them. Would you have the folk of Gondor gather you herbs only, when the Dark Lord gathers armies?[30]

Whether one raises a sword eagerly, like Boromir, or regretfully, like Faramir, it would appear that raise it he must or die.

However, Tolkien has not allowed the reader the comfort of excusing Middle-earth's bloody history solely on the fairly acceptable grounds of self-defense. Hobbits, maybe, would live, forever in peace and harmony were it safe to let all swords rust; from the example their life in the Shire provides, one might be inclined to hope so. Sadly, the same cannot be said of Men. For if Middle-earth is faulty and somehow tainted with evil, so is Man's very nature equally imperfect.

Given the chance to dwell in an idealized world where no necessity for self-defense could arise, Men created their own evil, indeed travelled back to Middle-earth in quest of it. The chronicles of earlier times tell us that the Valar "As a reward for their sufferings in the cause against Morgoth,...granted to the Edain a land to dwell in, removed from the dangers of Middle-earth [italics mine]."[31] Here, within distant sight of Eressëa itself, was an island kingdom free of Orcs, Wargs, and Trolls, unstained by the presence of Morgoth or Sauron, surely unassailable by any of the lesser men of Middle-earth who might worship the Dark Lord, and here the Númenoreans could have lived in peace forever, it would seem.

Man's only enemy in Númenor was his own nature, greedy of power, ambitious, and proud. Naval expeditions to Middle-earth, at first peaceful in aim but perhaps even then the sign of a kind of spiritual arrogance, became in time warlike armadas, subjecting the coastlands to Númenorean rule and levying tribute. Having chosen to venture back to these hazardous lands, the Men of Westernesse were reckless in their pride. And confident of their ability to deal with Evil Incarnate and remain unscathed, they imported the serpent to the Eden they had been offered, brought to Númenor, which itself had been "removed from the dangers of Middle-earth," Middle-earth's deadliest danger, Sauron himself.

From Númenor's tragic downfall we must conclude that Tolkien's view of the prospects for a permanent peace in Middle-earth or in any other mortal land is pessimistic in the extreme. Even were Middle-earth to be somehow cleansed of all Sauron's works and influences, even if all need were removed for Men of good will to defend themselves and their friends the Hobbits, even could a pleasant and prosperous society with enough for everyone be built, Men would sooner or later pull it down upon themselves, out of ambition, boredom, sheer perversity, perhaps original sin.

If, as it would appear, Tolkien believes war amongst Men to be inevitable, the reader can hardly expect to find in The Lord of the Rings an impassioned anti-war polemic. In any case such was not Tolkien's goal: his "prime motive," as he himself says, "was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them."[32] However, neither would one expect to find any account of warfare and killing to be an entirely cool and objective one, nor should it be. Moral judgments, implied or explicit, will naturally be expressed in one way or another. What the author chooses to present or withhold, and the sentiments he places in the mouths of his characters, both those he approves and those he despises, will in summation express a moral position. If only because a few critics have charged Tolkien with glorifying war, it is worthwhile to examine his presentation of the War of the Ring and to analyze how romantic or how ugly he decides to make it for us.

That some scenes of battle are exhilarating and thrilling cannot reasonably be denied. This is particularly true of the exploits of the Rohirrim, expecially the Battle of the Hornburg, and the great charge at cockcrow to the rescue of Gondor. At least a part of this glamour, however, relies upon the dissimilarity of the struggle to modern warfare. Galloping steeds are bound to be romantic to us in a way that tanks and jeeps are not, at least until Snowmane, pierced with an arrow, falls upon Théoden and crushes the life out of him. And phrases straight out of Anglo-Saxon poetry, "the stricken field," "the shield wall," remove smoke, blood, and noise to such a comfortable historical distance from our own world that the explosion of gunpowder, "Devilry of Saruman!...the fire of Orthanc,"[33] comes as a shocking intrusion, unfair tactics on the part of the Orcs. The sonorous Anglo-Saxon battle poetry Tolkien offers us may stir the reader to a desire for violent action, may delete heat and pain from its images; but Tolkien is fully aware of the discrepancy between war transformed into heroic verse and the reality of the dead and wounded. Thus, he counters the effect of the one on our imaginations by juxtaposing with it the bitter prose of the other, a grim reminder. A singer of the Mark exalts the dead:

> Neither Hirluin the Fair to the hills by the sea,
> nor Forlong the old to the flowering vales
> ever to Arnach, to his own country
> returned in triumph; nor the tall bowmen
> Derufin and Duilin, to their dark waters,
> meres of Morthond under mountain-shadows.
> Death in the morning and at day's ending
> lords took and lowly....[34]

Very moving, but next to this song Tolkien places an account that reminds the reader that such bardic sentiments are predicated upon a mound of real corpses.

> ...many others were hurt or maimed or dead upon the field. The axes hewed Forlong as he fought alone and unhorsed; and both Duilin of Morthond and his brother were trampled to death when they assailed the mûmakil, leading their bowmen close to shoot at the eyes of the monsters.[35]

The Riders of the Mark do begin the Battle of the Pelennor Fields with a fiery enthusiasm: "...they sang as they slew, for the joy of battle was on them, and the sound of their singing that was fair and terrible came even to the City."[36] But even their savage delight falters after the fall of Théoden King. Éomer, newly hailed as King of the Mark, calls the host back to the conflict:

> But the Rohirrim sang no more. Death they cried with one voice loud and terrible, and gathering speed like a great tide their battle swept about their fallen king and passed....[37]

In any case, lest we align ourselves too readily with the ardent military spirits of the Horselords, we are

reminded that they are not the most superior Men upon whom to model ourselves. Faramir classifies Men as "the High, or Men of the West, which were Númenoreans; and the Middle Peoples, Men of the Twilight, such as are the Rohirrim and their kin that dwell still far in the North; and the Wild, the Men of Darkness. Yet now,...We are become Middle Men, of the Twilight, but with memory of other things. For as the Rohirrim do, we now love war and valour as things good in themselves, both a sport and an end; and though we still hold that a warrior should have more skills and knowledge than only the craft of weapons and slaying, we esteem a warrior, nonetheless, above men of other crafts."[38]

Faramir's account of the decline of the Men of Gondor is not universally applicable, however. The values he himself earlier expresses would do credit to the House of Elendil in any age:

> I would see the White Tree in flower again in the courts of the kings, and the Silver Crown return, and Minas Tirith in peace: Minas Anor again as of old, full of light, high and fair, beautiful as a queen among other queens: not a mistress of many slaves, nay, not even a kind mistress of willing slaves. War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory.[39]

The reader is bidden to admire the Men of Gondor above the Rohirrim, and to see the most peaceful of them as also the strongest. Boromir, the man of arms, falls rapidly to the spell of Isildur's Bane, dreams of power, and attempts to seize the Ring from Frodo. Faramir, the younger and physically weaker, the man of lore and the reluctant soldier, emerges as the moral superior of his brother, sending Frodo and Sam freely on their way and sparing the life of Gollum. He even converts the fiery shieldmaiden Éowyn. For love of the young Steward she alters her whole vision of life and says, "I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren....No longer do I desire to be a queen."[39]

At times even the Hobbits are not proof against the insidious charms of military trappings, but again Tolkien strikes a balance. Merry and Pippin delight in their roles as squires and later knights of Gondor and the Mark, and even gentle little Bilbo is seduced into feeling that "It was rather splendid to be wearing a blade made in Gondolin for the goblin-wars of which so many songs had sung."[40] Too, Bilbo's hatred for the reality of the Battle of Five Armies is afterwards mellowed by time into the experience "he was most proud of, and most fond of recalling long afterwards."[41] On the other hand Sam, for all his love of tales and songs, recognizes that "Things done and over and made into part of the great tales are different,"[42] that art transforms the dreary reality of being hungry and cold, sleepy and afraid, and having to listen to Gollum's hissing voice going on and on.

Though both Merry and Pippin, who "can't live long on the heights,"[43] continue to enjoy their shields and armor after the return to the Shire, Frodo and Sam go back to their simple grey elven cloaks. Frodo, indeed, rejects the way of the sword altogether, a fact I will return to later.

In juxtaposition to armed charges that quicken the reader's blood, Tolkien places scenes that remind him of the hardships and misfortunes of ordinary folk in wartime. In Gondor, in Minas Tirith, even as the troops of the Outlands march bravely in, the wains roll off to "bear away to refuge the aged, the children, and the women that must go with them....Few, maybe, of those now sundered will meet again."[44] Similarly, in Rohan, as the Riders gallop to the Hornburg and battle, the approaching Orcs "bring fire...and they are burning as they come, rick, cot, and tree. This was a rich vale and had many homesteads."[45]

Although Tolkien is fully aware that warfare is more than sunlight upon flashing swords, or white horse upon green enamel shield, and although he frequently makes sure that the reader will not forget this, one should not expect to find in The Lord of the Rings graphic descriptions of the horrors of war. In the first place Tolkien is not a naturalist in style; were he to shift to naturalism in battle scenes to assure the reader's revulsion at bloodshed, the tone of the book would be seriously damaged. More consistent and appropriate in context are the austere formulae of the Anglo-Saxons: "wounded with many wounds," pierced with many black-feathered arrows," though these may cushion the reader's sensibilities from war's realities.

Partly too it is a question of taste, I think. Pippin, recounting to Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas the events of the Orc-march across Rohan, says, "I am not going into details: the whips and the filth and stench and all that; it does not bear remembering."[46] Tolkien would, on the whole, share this sentiment of restraint, I believe, and it would be no more reasonable to expect the gruesome images of some of the current anti-war poets in The Lord of the Rings than to hope to spy on the bedchamber of Aragorn and Arwen.

However, Tolkien is not indifferent to the horrors of war; though his taste generally leads him to show us a character "wounded with many wounds" rather than to furnish police-blotter statistics on the location and depth of each stab, occasionally he reminds us tersely but chillingly what really happens in battle. A tall handsome Ent named Beechbone goes up on "liquid fire"[47] at Isengard, and the Orcs and Men outside the gates of Gondor try to break the fighting spirits of the soldiers within by breaking their hearts:

> Then among the greater casts there fell another hail, less ruinous but more horrible. All about the streets and lanes behind the Gate it tumbled down, small round shot that did not burn. But when men ran to learn what it might be, they cried aloud or wept. For the enemy was flinging into the City all the heads of those who had fallen fighting at Osgiliath, or on the Rammas, or in the fields. They were grim to look on; for though some were crushed and shapeless, and some had been cruelly hewn, yet many had features that could be told, and it seemed that they had died in pain; and all were branded with the foul token of the Lidless Eye. But marred and dishonoured as they were, it often chanced that thus a man would see again the face of someone that he had known, who had walked proudly once in arms, or tilled the fields, or ridden in upon a holiday from the green vales in the hills.[48]

Here, indeed, is the ugliness of war, stripped of any glamour or romance.

Ugliness does not extend to more personal images, however. Only three characters whom the reader has been permitted to know will die, if Gandalf's fall and return from the dead is excepted: Thorin, regretting his greed; Théoden, in the midst of brave deeds and more than ripe in years; and Boromir, who, though pierced with many arrows, is a figure of beauty in his funeral boat. Nor are any of the books' major characters maimed in ugly, unromantic ways; the reader is not required to accommodate the horrid picture of a blind or crippled Hobbit or Elf. The arm in a sling, the bloodstained bandage about the brow--the archetypal injuries of the hero of a western film--more attractive than otherwise are the hurts of our heroes. A weakness? A squeamish reluctance to bring home to the reader the horrors of war? I wonder. As I reviewed the casualties sustained by the members of the fellowship and their close associates, I thought so at first. But upon reflection, it occurs to me that to present the maiming of a character whom the reader has come to know and love would have an effect other than disgusting him deeply with war. To focus upon the atrocities of the Orcs would be to invite that all too natural human response, revenge, rather than peace. Would Frodo's ultimate pacifism be given a fair hearing by the reader, would his message of peace and mercy even be noticed, if, on the return to the Shire, a crippled Sam or a sightless Meriadoc rode by his side?

As Tolkien balances before us the attractions and the ugliness of war, he also eloquently illustrates for us the contradictions and paradoxes of warfare and pacifism in Middle-earth through the use of two larger-than-life figures, Galadriel and, especially, Gandalf the Grey. Both members of the Wise, with roots in the Uttermost West, they must bridge the Great Sea which lies between the Undying Lands and Middle-earth, must minister to the needs of a mortal world while representing immortal values.

Galadriel it was who called the White Council, who preferred to trust Gandalf rather than Saruman, and who rejects the enormous temptation of the Ring when it is freely offered to her. Her realm, the Golden Wood of Lothlórien, though regarded with distrust and suspicion by the declining races of Men outside, seems, even more than the Shire, to be an Eden, a hidden pocket of immortality in

a tarnished mortal world: "On the land of Lórien there was no stain," and to Frodo it appears "timeless."[49] Sam tries to express the wholeness and perfection he perceives with "I've never heard of a better land than this. It's like being at home and on a holiday at the same time...,"[50] and Aragron warns Boromir to "Speak no evil of the Lady Galadriel!...There is in her and in this land no evil, unless a man bring it hither himself."[51]

Yet Galadriel herself has incurred the displeasure of the Valar for her part in the Noldorin revolt and their defiant assault on Morgoth, and a ban lies on her return to the West.[52] She must deal with the reality of Middle-earth, where the shadowy spires of Dol Guldur rise through the forest roof of Mirkwood, across the river from Lórien. Her recognition of her ambivalent position is reflected in her parting gifts to the Fellowship: a sheath for Aragorn's famous sword, a bow and arrows for Legolas, but also a box of earth and a mallorn seed for Sam. She is east of the Great Sea, and thus she must expect war as well as peace, must provide weapons as well as the means of renewal, rebirth, and growth.

Even more ambiguous and complex is the figure of Gandalf. Strategist, warrior, preacher of mercy, inspiration from beyond the Sea and the grave, he must play many roles and fulfill many needs. We meet him first in The Hobbit, accompanying the Dwarves, as the appendices of The Lord of the Rings later explain, for the purpose of ridding the North of Smaug and deflecting the threat of Dol Guldur to the South away from Rivendell.[53] Against the creatures of darkness, he can be as warlike as any Man or Dwarf: he traps the three trolls into their petrified destiny; kills several Goblins with a lightning flash from his staff; strikes down the Great Goblin and continues to wield Glamdring lustily against the pursuers in the Orc-mines; and sets blazing the coats of the wild Wargs. Allying himself with the Elvenking's besieging troops outside Erebor, he eventually fights more wolves and Orcs during the Battle of Five Armies, in which he is wounded.

In The Lord of the Rings Gandalf again bears a sword, but Tolkien presents him far oftener as an inspiration than as a slayer of Men. Significantly, those battles in which we are permitted to view him in close-up, as it were, are against such creatures as Orcs, the Balrog, and one of the Ringwraiths, not Men. Outside the walls of Minas Tirith his mere presence as the White Rider helps to rally the retreating Men of Gondor and to dismay the servants of the Enemy without the necessity of his brandishing steel against Southron and Easterling. During the Battle of the Hornburg he gallops off on Shadowfax to gather the Westfold-men rather than lingering to kill men of Dunland. In the final conflict at the Black Gate of Mordor, his concern is more for the rescue of Frodo and Sam than for the battle at hand.

While Gandalf readily helps Men, Elves, Dwarves, and Hobbits to organize and marshall their military forces in self-defense, indeed, even urges action in the case of Théoden, more frequently he is the eloquent spokesman for mercy. Before Frodo's quest has really begun, the wizard warns him that killing should not be lightly undertaken:

> Pity? It was Pity that stayed [Bilbo's] hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity....Deserves [death]! I dare say [Gollum] does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends....the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many--yours not least.[54]

Similarly, he counsels Théoden to be merciful to Grima Wormtongue:

> ...here is a snake! With safety you cannot take it with you, nor can you leave it behind. To slay it would be just. But it was not always as it now is. Once it was a man and did you service in its fashion.[55]

Justice, the death a traitor deserves; even prudence, the real dangers of letting such an one go free--these are less vital to Gandalf than the virtue of pity. The latter quality he displays even to Saruman, to whom he offers freedom and forgiveness in exchange for his staff and the Key of Orthanc. When Saruman remains unregenerate, Gandalf breaks his staff and casts him from the order and from the White Council, but he does not undertake this punishment gladly. "I grieve," he tells Pippin, "that so much that was good now festers in the tower."[56]

Observing Gandalf and Denethor together in Minas Tirith, Pippin puzzles over the nature of the wizard. He "perceived that Gandalf had the greater power and the deeper wisdom, and a majesty that was veiled. And he was older, far older....What was Gandalf? In what far time and place did he come into the world, and when would he leave it?"[57]

What is Gandalf? To Denethor he characterizes himself as also "a steward," caring for "all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands," attempting to preserve through the coming darkness "anything...that can still grow fair or bear fruit or flower again in days to come."[58] To Faramir he is more than just a lore-master of many names and identities, and to Treebeard he is, like all wizards, a worrier about the future. He is a commander of the last defenses to the Men of Gondor, as Denethor sinks into madness and Faramir sleeps in fever. Frodo brings together many of the wizard's roles in his verses written in Lorien:

> A deadly sword, a healing hand,
> a back that bent beneath its load;
> a trumpet-voice, a burning brand,
> a weary pilgrim on the road.[59]

He has been sent on his pilgrimage from the Uttermost West, apparently, though whether by the Valar or by High-Elves Tolkien does not say. The appendices, speculating on the nature and purposes of the wizards or Istari, state that:

> It was afterwards said that they came out of the Far West and were messengers sent to contest the power of Sauron, and to unite all those who had the will to resist him; but they were forbidden to match his power with power, or to seek to dominate Elves or Men by force or fear. They came therefore in the shape of Men, though they were never young and aged only slowly, and they had many powers of mind and hand. The two highest of this order (of whom it is said there were five) were called...Saruman and Gandalf. Cirdan later surrendered his ring to Mithrandir [Gandalf]..., knowing whence he came and whither he would return,[60]

Gandalf himself at times refers to his origins and his task in Middle-earth: "I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor,"[61] he warns the Balrog in Moria; and among his many names, he tells Faramir, "Olórin I was in my youth in the West that is forgotten."[62] After his return from the dead, he tells Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas, "Naked I was sent back--for a brief time, until my task is done,"[63] and later, leaving the Hobbits on the borders of Bombadil's country, he asks, "Do you not yet understand? My time is over: it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor to help folk to do so."[64]

It is not surprising that Gandalf is concerned with pity and mercy; as a messenger from the Undying Lands he might be expected to present peaceful rather than martial values. Yet is it not an ironic comment on the nature of Middle-earth that even a being of Gandalf's powers, able to return from the abyss to life again, must often turn to war after preaching peace? "I am not coming to the Shire," he tells the Hobbits. "You must settle its affairs yourself; that is what you have been trained for."[65] What they have been chiefly trained for is to defend themselves by the sword, if necessary, and Gandalf ends his mission in Middle-earth knowing that war and killing have not ended there. Both he and Galadriel, the ban against her lifted at last, will depart Middle-earth for a more perfect existence, but they have not been able to alter the nature of Mortal Lands.

The nature of one small mortal, one Hobbit, has been altered, however, and it is not to swordplay that his experiences have educated him. Frodo, who begins by wishing that Bilbo had killed Gollum, and who, even in Moria, brings a fair degree of enthusiasm to fighting Orcs, is gradually transformed into a complete pacifist. At the Field of Cormallen he wears Bilbo's old sword Sting with reluctance, even for purely ceremonial purposes.[66]

The change and growth wrought in Frodo by his long burden and his sufferings become apparent first when he meets with Gollum in the Emyn Muil. His own and Gandalf's words return to him from the past, and aloud he answers his thought: "Very well....But still I am afraid. And yet,

as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him."[67]

After his poisoning by Shelob, his awareness of pain and imperfection becomes even more intensified, and he understands a little of the alteration in himself. He gives Sting to Sam, saying, "I do not think it will be my part to strike any blow again."[68]

Arwen Evenstar anticipates the pain Frodo will experience when the discrepancies between his own changed character and the unchanged demands of life in Middle-earth become more apparent to him, and she offers him an alternative:

> If your hurts grieve you still and the memory of your burden is heavy, then you may pass into the West, until all your wounds and weariness are healed....[69]

Both the pain and the demands come sooner than anyone except perhaps Gandalf might expect; at Rivendell, Frodo no longer finds every desire satisfied: the Sea, the infinite, is missing. And while to Merry, the adventures of the past months seem "almost like a dream that has slowly faded," to Frodo "it feels more like falling asleep again"[70] to go back to the Shire.

Action is required of the four Hobbits as soon as they reach the Buckland gate; for agents of Saruman, both half-Orcs and base Men, have occupied their little land. Merry, Pippin, and Sam, confident of their ability to deal with the ruffians, are amused by the Shirriffs, but "Frodo, however, was silent and looked rather sad and thoughtful."[71] When one of the men insults Frodo, the other three Hobbits draw their swords, but Frodo does not move or reach for a weapon.

His strongest feelings are pity (for Lotho) and a passionate wish that the Shire not be stained with bloodshed:

> ...remember: there is to be no slaying of hobbits, not even if they have gone over to the other side....No hobbit has ever killed another on purpose in the Shire, and it is not to begin now. And nobody is to be killed at all, if it can be helped....I wish for no killing; not even of the ruffians, unless it must be done, to prevent them from hurting hobbits.[72]

He himself cannot kill even in such defense; in the Battle of By-water, he does not draw a sword; his chief activity is to prevent angry Hobbits from killing those ruffians who have surrendered.

Even for Saruman he feels pity, much to the fallen wizard's annoyance, and he tried to prevent an inevitable murder. Saruman recognizes that Frodo has grown; he also senses that he will have neither health nor long life, perhaps because of that growth.

In friendly but firm opposition to Frodo's pacifism, Merry expresses the practical view of Middle-earth:

> ...if there are many of these ruffians,...it will certainly mean fighting. You won't rescue Lotho, or the Shire, just by being shocked and sad, my dear Frodo.[73]

and here we are come to the thin edge of the wedge. Here, in explicit juxtaposition, are two kinds of wisdom. Here is the pacifist's ultimate dilemma.

If evil exists in the world, the weak must be defended against it, or die. Just being shocked and sorry won't save the Shire. Nor would any of the Jews of Europe have survived had all men of good will refused to hear arms in World War II. Merry's position has a good deal of practical wisdom to recommend it; if one values Middle-earth, the temporal, at all, and most of us do, he will think the Shire is worth saving.

Yet the superior spiritual values of the Uttermost West cannot be denied. Through his long travail Frodo's understanding and compassion have lifted him above and beyond the compromises of Middle-earth. No longer can he deal with the finite on its own imperfect terms. But he is no narrow Medieval saint, able to contemplate mortal suffering with smug equanimity just because it is temporal. Like many pacifists he feels an increased love and pity for all living creatures; unable to act in their defense by slaying even one of them, he can only move from agony to agony in a world so flawed.

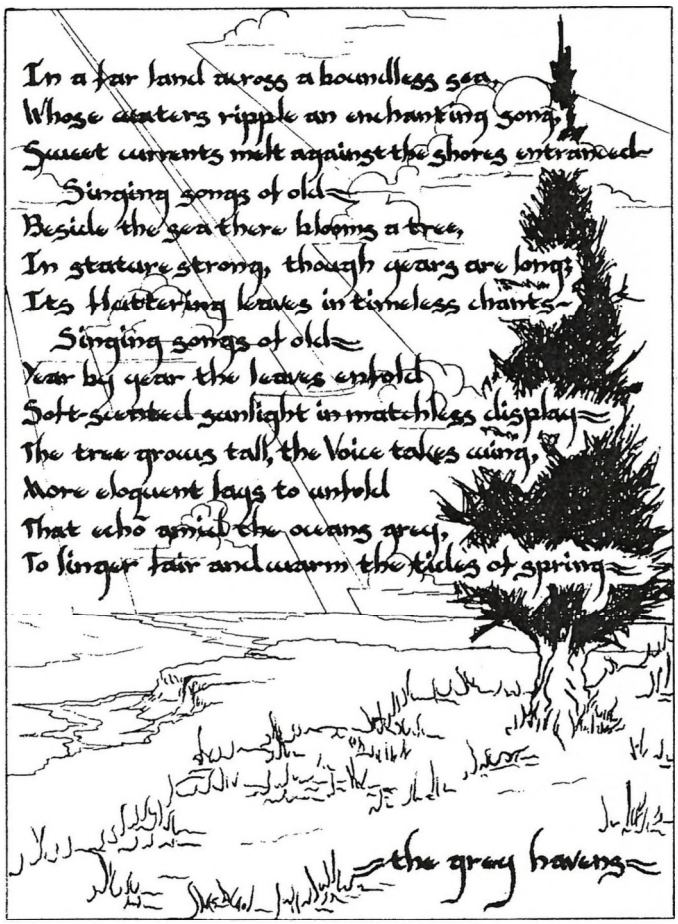
Or he can leave it, as he must. If Tolkien is pessimistic about any hopes for a permanent peace in mortal lands, he is no more optimistic about the lot of the pacifist. One who loves his fellow creatures too keenly, one who has grown more than is usual in our limiting Middle-earth, can never find rest in this strained world. Frodo is no longer fitted for life in Middle-earth; he can only pass into the Uttermost West over Great Sea to find peace and rest from pain. Though he would not see himself in such exalted terms, he might justly echo Shaw's Saint Joan: "O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"[74]

And yet. And yet as necessary as arms have seemed on Middle-earth, as essential to survival as the sword has appeared to be, the overthrow of Sauron has been . . accomplished not by using weapons but, ultimately, by withholding the sword. But for four separate acts of mercy all of the defenses of sword, shield, and tower would have been altogether futile, each victory utterly in vain. First little Bilbo, filled with "A sudden understanding, a . . . pity mixed with horror,"[75] has spared Gollum, and his pity does indeed come to rule many destinies. In the Emyn Muil, Frodo, although still afraid, responds with pity too. Later in Ithilien Faramir, his own peaceful nature moved by Frodo's pleas, allows Gollum to live. Finally, and most crucial, on the slopes of Mount Doom itself, even Sam, the comman man, "with drawn blade ready for battle," wavers in pity for Gollum. Although "It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved;" and although every value of prudence and necessity would show it "the only safe thing to do,...deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched."[76] It is these four rejections of violence and killing, each at a time when expedience would have cried out for the sword, these four acts of mercy, that save what can be saved through yet another night in Middle-earth. Since to Middle-earth and mortal lands we are doomed, let us take what comfort we can in this.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Fellowship of the Ring (Second Edition, Revised; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 14.
2. The Return of the King (Second Edition, Revised; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 285.
3. Fellowship, p. 15.
4. Ibid., p. 18.
5. Ibid., p. 14.
6. Ibid., p. 157.
7. The Hobbit (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, n.d.), p. 274.
8. Ibid., p. 251.
9. Ibid., p. 298.
10. Fellowship, p. 10.
11. Return, p. 315.
12. Fellowship, p. 261.
13. Ibid., p. 93.
14. Return, pp. 271, 272.
15. The Two Towers (Second Edition, Revised; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 72.
16. Fellowship, p. 256.
17. Ibid.
18. Hobbit, p. 295.
19. Fellowship, p. 20.
20. Towers, p. 155.
21. Return, p. 155.
22. The Fellowship of the Ring (First Edition; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954), p. 7.
23. Fellowship (Second Edition, Revised), p. 60.
24. Towers, p. 89.
25. Return, p. 190.
26. Towers, p. 269.
27. Ibid., p. 38.
28. Return, p. 237.
29. Towers, p. 283.
30. Return, p. 236.
31. Ibid., p. 315.
32. Fellowship, p. 6.
33. Towers, p. 142.
34. Return, p. 125.
35. Ibid., p. 124.
36. Ibid., p. 113.
37. Ibid., p. 119.
38. Towers, p. 287.
39. Return, p. 243.

40. Hobbit, p. 81.
41. Ibid., p. 293.
42. Towers, p. 322.
43. Return, p. 146.
44. Ibid., p. 36.
45. Towers, p. 135.
46. Ibid., pp. 168, 169.
47. Ibid., p. 173.
48. Return, p. 96.
49. Fellowship, p. 365.
50. Ibid., p. 376.
51. Ibid., p. 373.
52. "Notes and Translations," The Road Goes Ever On (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 60.
53. Return, pp. 359, 360.
54. Fellowship, pp. 68, 69.
55. Towers, p. 125.
56. Ibid., p. 190.
57. Return, p. 29.
58. Ibid., pp. 30, 31.
59. Fellowship, p. 375.
60. Return, p. 365.
61. Fellowship, p. 344.
62. Towers, p. 279.
63. Ibid., p. 106.
64. Return, p. 275.
65. Ibid.
66. Return, p. 233.
67. Towers, p. 222.
68. Return, p. 204.
69. Ibid., pp. 252, 253.
70. Ibid., p. 276.
71. Ibid., p. 282.
72. Ibid., pp. 285, 289.
73. Ibid., p. 285.
74. Saint Joan (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1924), p. 159.
75. Hobbit, p. 98.
76. Return, pp. 221, 222.



REVIEWS

The Applicability of The Lord of the Rings

-- Edward Fitzgerald

Ellwood, Gracia Fay. Good News from Tolkien's Middle Earth. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 160 pp. photographs. $3.25 indexed. paperback.

Each of the various books published that concern themselves with J. R. R. Tolkien and his created Universe of Middle Earth have tried to relate The Lord of the Rings, his master work, to the real world. Ready takes on the burden of analysing the man, Tolkien, and fails miserably, tumbling to the ground under the crushing weight of the author's personality. Carter attempts to relate Tolkien's work to the literary genre Fantasy, discussing the influence that it has had upon Tolkien, and the way that he will influence it. Carter also goes the way of Tinkler, building a relationship between the words and names in LotR and those of the Primary world. Essayists represented in Tolkien and the Critics all attempt to analyse LotR in terms of our world, some succeeding, some failing. And so, of course, it is not surprising that the newest book on the scene is subtitled "Two Essays on the 'Applicability' of The Lord of the Rings."

The book is Good News from Tolkien's Middle Earth, authored by Gracia Fay Ellwood. What is most surprising about this book is the first of the two essays "Everything is Alive: An Essay on Magic in Middle Earth and Elsewhere." This essay presents what is perhaps the freshest approach to the exploration of LotR in terms of our Primary world. What Mrs. Ellwood attempts to do is to show that we are very much like Shirefolk when we think (if we ever do) about things which she describes as "paranormal;" clairvoyance, clairaudience, precognition, retrocognition, to name some examples. The Shirefolk's knowledge of the world extended past their borders only in order to include Bree in their sphere. In fact, each farthing or section of the Shire thought the inhabitants of the other areas of the Shire to be queer or not quite normal. We are the same way in the limits that we impose upon reality. In fact, says the author, we can only appreciate the "aliveness" of everything in reality by throwing away (for the moment) our usual objective-analytic minds, and using the facilities of our myth-making unconscious. And what better way to do this then to compare aspects of the "paranormal" in our world with the degrees of aliveness in Middle Earth. When the author has done just that, we have learned more about our own world then about Middle Earth, but we have found another way in which Middle Earth and LotR can be related, "Applied", to our own reality, however unreal that may be.

In her second essay, "The Good Guys: A Study in Christ-Imagery", the first part of which appeared in the Tolkien Journal in a slightly altered form as "The Good Guys and the Bad Guys" (TJ 10, pp. 9-11), the author falls back on more well-trodden ground. Many essayists have attempted analyses of LotR as a Christian document. Some have called the trilogy allegory, while others point out that the basic morality of the book is Christian. In this essay, however, the author shies away from allegory (she points out, as have many, that Tolkien dislikes it himself, but like Reilly she admits that the critic must discuss not intentions, but what the author has actually created) and expresses instead the symbolism of LotR. Thus, she examines Tom Bombadil, Gandalf, Frodo and Aragorn, and finds in each of the last three some traces of the different aspects of Christ. Frodo, for instance, has the meekness and humility of Christ, while Aragorn is Christ the King and Gandalf Christ the Miracle Worker. All three undergo adventures which can be taken as being symbolic of the Fall and Ascension of Christ, and Aragorn's coming into his Kingship telescopes both the Ascension and the Second Coming. In Tom Bombadil, the author finds aspects of the unfallen Adam (but not an Eve in Goldberry), and uses her analysis of him as a point of comparison between the three heroes of the Ring tale.

Mrs. Ellwood has admirably presented what she announces that she will, two essays on the applicability of LotR. In these two well written, easily read discourses she has both reinforced many ideas concerning Professor Tolkien's magnificent trilogy, and presented some exciting new ones concerning the Primary "multi-verse" in which we (and everything else) live.